#### THE DAILY rounded in 1893

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## $E_{\it ditorials}$

### Yes to Alternative D, with minor tinkering

ew expanses of public lands offer the beauty, access, variety of terrain and have as many human visitors or as much economic impact as the 2.2-million-acre White River National Forest that stretches from Colorado's Continental Divide to the eastern edge of Mesa County. Little wonder then, that the congressionally mandated requirement to update the 15-year-old management plan for the forest has generated intense public debate.

The public comment period for the draft ends on May 8.

The planning effort has produced management proposals as different as a relatively restrictive plan emphasizing environmental protectionism created by the Aspen Wilderness Workshop to a more multiple-use-oriented plan advanced by 3rd District Rep. Scott McInnis.

McInnis has been pilloried in some quarters for advancing what critics maintain is a reactionary plan that serves so-called special interests - read that, ski areas, timber

interests and the motorized vehicle lobby. In point of fact, there is much to like in McInnis' plan, which was drawn up largely by two retired foresters; former River Supervisor Richard 'Woody' Woodrow of Glenwood Springs and Bob Cron, a retired Gallatin National Forest ranger who lives in Grand Junction and who played a key role in developing the

Mesa County/Grand Junction Riverfront Commission's Legacy Project plan.

posal is — which, by the way, will be accepted by the Forest Service as one of thousands of official "comments" — the agency's preferred Alternative D remains the best option, with a few important qualifications.

Although the issue of water bypass flows isn't specific to any of the various management plans under consideration. The concerns of McInnis and many in Colorado's water community are understandable. That is the mandate that individuals or municipalities with water facilities on the forest give up a portion of their water to enhance stream flows on the forest. The requirement, while fundamentally appealing in terms of ecosystem protection, is a direct contravention of Colorado water law and fails to recognize that many of the water rights in question predate the establishment of the national forests.

However, that issue is not likely to be decided locally. Forest Service officials in Washington seem intent on pressing the issue throughout Colorado and forcing the state to challenge the practice in court.

The Forest Service should also reconsider the blanket prohibition on all ski-area expansion outside of existing boundaries currently in Alternative D. That is not to say ski areas should expand throughout the forest with little regard to the environmental consequences. But some expansion—such as undeveloped terrain on the west end of Vail's back bowls toward Minturn—may make sense and have little environmental impact. McInnis' plan would allow the Forest Service to at least consider such expansions, with appropriate environmental studies.

It should be noted that McInnis. his staff and volunteers put a tremendous effort into their proposal, meeting with a variety of groups and individuals. The congressman might easily have adopted the position of naysayer, carping from the sidelines about the Forest Service plan while offering no

nstructive ideas of his own. He chose not to do so. The primary problem with his effort is he did not begin it earlier in the planning process, leaving the appearance that it was a last-minute attempt to derail the Forest Service plan.

Unfortunately, the McInnis plan — as of 10 days ago when the congressman met with The Daily Sentinel's editorial board — was woefully vague on what we feel is the most critical issue facing the White River National Forest: wide-spread abuse of the forest resource through virtually uncontrolled off-road-vehicle use.

The McInnis plan would require ATVs to stay on existing, signed trails, a much needed requirement. But there was no indication of the actual miles of trails in his plan.

Alternative D, on the other hand, would close some 360 miles of what are largely ad hoc trails blazed by ATVs and motorcycles over the past 15 years. But it would still leave more than 1,600 miles of trails exclusively for those recreational vehicles. It would also cut the trails open to mountain bikes from 3,800 to 2,700 miles. It is a reasonably balanced effort to control a forest use that virtually did not exist the last time a White River National Forest management plan was adopted.

Alternative D also takes a reasoned approach to such things as grazing (closing only allotments that are no longer in use) and wilderness preservation (increasing the existing 750,000 acres only modestly to 800,000).

Forest Supervisor Martha Ketelle and her staff have done good jub attempting to balance the diverse human demands on the forest with its biological requirements. With some minor tinkering — tinkering that should include the best of McInnis' detailed input — Alternative D merits adoption and implementation.

# McInnis seeks extension of period to comment on White River plan

By MARIJA B. YADER

The Daily Sendinet

U.S. Rep. Scott Melinis Thursday called for a 185 day extension to the public comment period for the White River National Forest Pian, so the public can thoroughly review what he called an "enormous 14 pound proposal."

Released last month, the plan details how the U.S. Forest Service will manage the forest's 2.27 million acres, which stretch from Battlement Me sa to the Continental Divide, for the next 10 to 15

Forest Supervisor Martha Ketelle said she's open to extending the comment period but hasn't yet spoken with McInnis, R-Colo. Last week, she extended the comment period by one month.

Some 1,100 copies of the document have been distributed already, and the forest service has ordered a second printing because of intense interest. Ketelle said.

The sheer size of the forest plan, coupled with implications the plan will have on an large portion of land in western Colorado, necessitates an extension of the period people can offer comments, McInnis said.

"There's no way the forest service could reasonably expect anyone to digest this enormous 14-pound proposal and then in turn formulate a response in only 90 days," McInnis said. "If this deadline isn't extended, the legitimacy of whatever decision the forest service ultimately reaches will be seriously called into question."

Public meetings held throughout the region have attracted between 80 and 300 people each, Ketelle said.

"We're hearing from a lot of people and that's good," Ketelle said.

Ranked fifth in the United States in recreational use, the White River National Forest contains 64 percent of Colorado's skiing acreage and eight of the state's highest mountains.

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## Root for locals in showdown over Forest Plan We're headed for a showdown between the feds and And he isn't alone in his concern over the relatively brief

locals over the new Forest Plan. We'd better root for the locals.

Eagle County Commissioner Tom Stone said last week he's ready to do battle with the U.S. Forest Service over the

## SCOTT N. MILLER

90-day public comment period for the draft of the new land management plan for the White River

National Forest. Stone contends a 90-day, or even 120-day review period simply isn't enough for a document that took more than two years to develop and, in printed form, weighs about 14 pounds. It's also not enough when you consider that management decisions on the national forest in this area will have a direct or indirect impact on virtually all other property in Eagle, Summit and Pitkin counties.

While federal officials say getting more than 120 days for comment on the plan will require heroic efforts, there's a move afoot to bring just that level of effort to bear.

Stone is ready to lobby Third District Representative Scott Mclinis for congressional intervention over the plan.

comment period.

Colorado Counties Incorporated, a statewide lobbying group, is ready to ask for a one-year extension on the comment period, as are various other private and public agencies, all of whom are worried about the apparent lack of local input into the planning process.

And, lest you think that the folks howling for an extension are mostly developers, Jeepers or their cronies, consider the following, courtesy of the Colorado Bicycle Coalition:

"Several popular mountain bike trails in Summit County will close if the draft White River Travel Management Plan is adopted ...

"Concerned mountain bikers should write letters and attend the open houses, asking that the Travel Management Plan be delayed until a thorough public process is undertaken... The Forest Plan moves from having all trails 'open unless closed to bikes to restricting bikes to designated routes only. This is a trend in National Forests across the country, and is not necessarily a problem for mountain bikers as long as cyclists are involved in designating the trail system. Unfortunately, WRNF never sat down with user

groups to determine which trails were important to users and how wildlife concerns could be addressed while pre serving a functional trail system..."

As you've read in this space before, the U.S. Forest Service needs to provide more, not fewer, recreational opportunities on land owned by all of us. It's possible to do that, and continue to provide opportunities for logging. mining and agriculture in economically and environmental ly responsible ways. And while many eco-groups will argue otherwise, current policy is being largely dictated by politics, not science, and by people whose idea of "multiple use" is hiking and snowshoeing.

Yes, it's hard to find, much less walk, the fine line between true multiple use of public lands and wise stew ardship of those lands. But that line can, and indeed must, be found.

And with plan revisions coming up for three other national forests in Colorado in the next four years, it's time to find that line here in the White River National Forest now, then use that model through the rest of the state. And that means the sooner the comment period is extended, and the plan is opened up for meaningful revision, the better off the state as a whole will be.